



STUDY GUIDE



THE
NATIONAL THEATRE
FOUNDATION

MJ the Musical

The National Theatre
August 13 – September 8, 2024

Featuring the Music of Michael Jackson
Book by Lynn Nottage
Directed and Choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon
Music Supervision, Orchestration, and Arrangements by David Holcenberg
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Leayne C. Dempsey

He is one of the greatest entertainers of all time. Now, Michael Jackson's unique and unparalleled artistry comes to D.C. in ***MJ***, the multiple Tony Award®-winning musical centered around the making of the 1992 Dangerous World Tour. Created by Tony Award®-winning Director/Choreographer **Christopher Wheeldon** and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner **Lynn Nottage**, ***MJ*** goes beyond the singular moves and signature sound of the star, offering a rare look at the creative mind and collaborative spirit that catapulted Michael Jackson into legendary status. It's thrilling sold out crowds on Broadway, in cities across North America, and in London's West End...and now ***MJ*** is startin' somethin' in D.C. as it makes its premiere at The National Theatre in August 2024.

The ***MJ*** creative team features Scenic Design by two-time Tony and Emmy Award winner **Derek McLane**, Lighting Design by seven-time Tony Award winner **Natasha Katz**, Costume Design by Tony and Emmy Award winner **Paul Tazewell**, Sound Design by Tony Award winner **Gareth Owen**, Projection Design by two-time Tony Award nominee **Peter Nigrini**, and Hair & Wig Design by two-time Emmy Award nominee **Charles G. LaPointe**. The creative team also features Musical Supervision by Tony Award nominee **David Holcenberg**, Orchestrations and Arrangements by **David Holcenberg** and Tony Award winner **Jason Michael Webb**, and Music Direction by **Nathanael Wilkerson** and **Jason Yarcho**. Casting by **The Telsey Office / Rachel Hoffman, CSA, Lindsay Levine, CSA**.

MJ is recommended for ages 8 and up.

Running time is 2 hours 40 minutes, including an intermission.



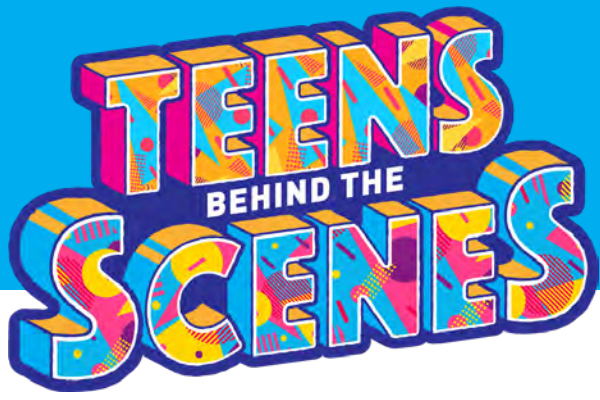
For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—"America's Main Street"—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone's throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its "front yard," The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation's Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION
Beryl Jolly, Chief Executive Officer
Jared Strange, Director of Education & Community Programs
Carey Lavalley, Director of Administration
Paul Reagan, Director of Operations
Madeline Meszaros, Development Operations & Special Events Manager

Written and Curated by Leayne C. Dempsey, Dramaturg
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20004
www.nationaltheatre.org



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

We are excited to welcome you to The National Theatre through our *Teens Behind the Scenes* program! Whether you're a new theatre-goer or a seasoned veteran, here are a few things to bear in mind.

WHAT WILL I BE SEEING?

Over the course of its long history, The National Theatre has hosted many memorable productions. These days, the shows you are most likely to see here are Broadway tours. A Broadway tour grows out of a production that is currently running or recently ran on Broadway in New York City. The touring version uses the same script, musical score, choreography, and direction. The production elements, such as the sets and costumes, are largely the same, too, though many have been adapted so they can be transported across the country. The actors you see onstage are also traveling all over the country, often for a year or more at a time. In other words, the show you see in Washington, DC is the same show that folks in Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Atlanta might have just seen, too.

In addition to Broadway tours, you may also see the occasional pre-Broadway tryout. This is when producers debut a show in a major city outside of New York in order to test new or revised material in front of a paying audience. Oftentimes, the creative team adjusts the show based on audience reactions before moving on to New York, usually with much of the same cast and crew in tow.

HOW CAN I MAXIMIZE MY EXPERIENCE?

Historically, audience members' behavior at the theatre has been guided, and sometimes constrained, by unspoken norms or "rules." Over time, certain norms like formal dress codes have gradually relaxed, allowing for a more inclusive environment. Rather than list other "rules," we want to share some considerations that will help you enjoy your time at The National..

- **Arrive early and look for the ushers.** This gives you time to grab refreshments and use the restroom. If you are late and the show has already started, you may have to wait to be seated. The ushers can direct you to your seat and answer any questions you have.
- **Respect the space and your fellow audience members.** Consume any food and drink you bring into the auditorium carefully. Keep the aisles and rows clear by putting your belongings under your seat. Be mindful of your neighbor's personal bubble and stand to let them pass if need be. Generally, avoid talking during a performance; if you must, keep it to a whisper or briefly share your thoughts during laughter or applause.
- **Take a break from your screen.** Cellphones and tablets shine brightly in the dark and their noises can distract from the experience. Be sure to silence your devices and put them away. An exception is a closed captioning app like GalaPro, which you can use on your device; you can also request a special device from the theatre.
- **Show your appreciation.** If you enjoyed that big musical number, applaud and cheer! If something shocks or surprises you, feel free to gasp! Laugh if the moment calls for it; nothing kills a comedy like a quiet auditorium. While courtesy is important, it shouldn't stop you from having a good time.

GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OUR TBTS WEBINAR SERIES

The TBTS Webinar series is a collection of interviews with emerging and leading theatre professionals, each conducted by one of our TBTS Dramaturgs. The artists share their pathways into the profession, what their creative process entails, and what young artists like yourself can learn from their experience. Check out this summer's offerings, featuring the artistic director of one of America's leading regional theatres, a prolific actor and teacher, a Tony-nominated lighting designer, a New York-based stage manager, a composer and music director, and a professor and leading access specialist!



The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF MUSIC DIRECTION
featuring Kristin Stowell

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr
in June 2024

KRISTIN STOWELL

LINDSEY R. BARR



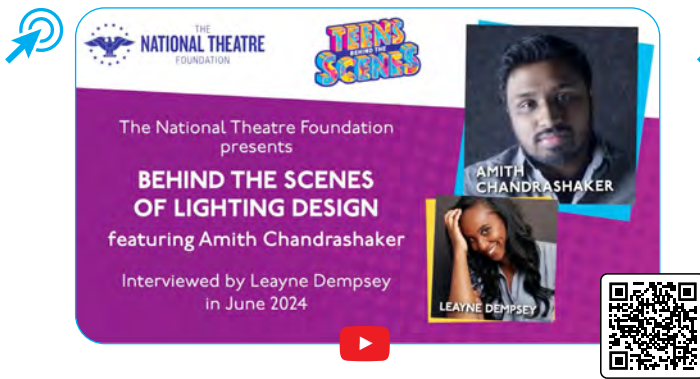
The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF STAGE MANAGEMENT
featuring Maria De Barros

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr
in June 2024

MARIA DE BARROS

LINDSEY R. BARR



The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF LIGHTING DESIGN
featuring Amith Chandrashaker

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey
in June 2024

AMITH CHANDRASHAKER

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF DRAMATURGY
featuring Samuel Yates

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey
in July 2024

SAMUEL YATES

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF ACTING
featuring Ro Boddie

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey
in July 2024

RO BODDIE

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

BEHIND THE SCENES OF ARTISTIC DIRECTION
featuring Hana S. Sharif

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr
in August 2024

HANA S. SHARIF

LINDSEY R. BARR



A LETTER FROM THE DRAMATURG

If there is one song that would be the soundtrack of my life growing up in the early 90s, it would be Michael Jackson's "Human Nature." I remember so vividly hearing that song on the radio on my way to cheerleading practices in the late summer and early fall. Yet, the song I remember wasn't even Michael Jackson's! It was a sample used in SWV's hit song "Right Here." It's the nature of a superstar artist to enrich the work of those who come after him, and that is how Michael Jackson's songs have become timeless.

Michael Jackson was an iconic performer who brought much joy to my family growing up. His sweet falsetto was unmistakable to me, even as a young kid, and everyone in my family could mimic his smooth moves. My mom would tell my brother and me that there was "no one cooler than Mike." And my dad gifted my brother the *Thriller* album when he was only four years old (he was a bonafide '80s baby). Needless to say, Michael Jackson was an iconic performer that brought much joy to my family.

There's no doubt that Michael Jackson was a complex, sometimes controversial man, but few argue with his status as the King of Pop, one of the greatest entertainers of all time. Still, most of us only knew him as an entertainer or tabloid figure, rather than someone with a life outside of the media coverage, the headlines, and the primetime interviews. I think that's what intrigues us about megastars like Michael Jackson. After the performance ends, it seems like they go into another universe, only to be spotted again at the top of another show. But what is their creative process like when they're building the show? What are their frustrations and challenges? Did even someone as successful as Michael Jackson have his creative blocks like the rest of us?

MJ the Musical addresses these questions by exploring Michael Jackson, the artist. It celebrates who he was as an entertainer and digs deep to discover how he created the songs, dances, and concerts that have gone down in history as among the greatest of all time. It isn't often that the audience gets the opportunity to see how the creator creates, and that is what *MJ the Musical* gives its audience a chance to do.

In this study guide, you will take a deep dive into the anatomy of one of Michael Jackson's most famous concert tours, The Dangerous Tour. You'll have your very own front-row seat to Jackson's ability to compose a history-making performance, and you'll learn a few of his performance secrets, too.

Like the show, we get up close, and we investigate the brilliance of the icon who started somethin'.

Best,
Leayne Dempsey
Teens Behind the Scenes Dramaturg

WHAT'S A MUSIC SAMPLE?

Sampling is a common practice used in the music industry in which an artist takes audio from another music source and reworks it into their song. R&B group, SWV, samples Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" in their hit song "Right Here." Check it out here! Can you hear the sample?!



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